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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study of a Philadelphia elementary school program in English as a second language focused on the way children's first and second languages were used in the classroom, and how this use of language was connected to the learning process. It was found that despite teachers' claims of emphasis on communication skills, a number of classes focused primarily on academic and socialization tasks promoting language skills. It was observed that socialization plays an important role in teachers' implicit definitions of communicative competence, and that emphasis on socialization may occur because of lack of shared cultural norms between teacher and students. It was also found that being a successful student is a more complex issue than it appeared initially, even in a well-structured program with supportive administration and a high-quality teaching staff, because children must decipher the teacher's goals in different situations. Finally, the use of ethnographic methods revealed that in order to examine language use in the classroom, much needs to be understood about the use of language in various classroom "events." These events, social, communicative, and academic, are often difficult for the students to distinguish as mutually exclusive. As a result, the student is often confused about the kind of language to use for a particular event, and the meaning of the event in the context of the school and even the community. (MSE/TR)

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USING ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS IN AN ESL PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper evolves from research currently underway in a Philadelphia elementary school. The research is a longitudinal study which aims to characterize the language learning and literacy acquisition of a diverse population of second language learners, many of whom are recent arrivals from Southeast Asia, Puerto Rico, Angola, and Afghanistan. Since the nation as a whole and Philadelphia in particular has undergone a tremendous shift in terms of the second language population in recent years, it is vital to understand more about how these children learn English and how they achieve success in the school context.

Our research group was formed because, due to our different training and methodological expertise, we could provide varied approaches to the analysis of the learning process in a school context. In particular, we were interested in the development of second language proficiency, the way that children's first and second languages are used in the classroom, and how this language use is connected to the learning process. We decided to begin our investigation by using ethnographic methods, since we could then get a broader picture of the existing social context within which language was framed in an elementary ESL classroom situation.

In this paper, we will first describe the elementary school ESL program in which we have observed and the students it serves. Next, we will describe how we approached doing the research initially, and how we developed the means of organizing the data that we present here. Finally, we will discuss some of the insights into the learning process--and the process of doing ethnography itself--that developed out of this work.

First, we were interested in selecting a site which would offer a rich variety of students from many different L1 backgrounds, because we were interested in how language use would operate in a multi-cultural social context. We approached the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Planning of the Philadelphia School District and received help in selecting a site in a school where the teachers and administration were receptive to our research. This school has an ESL program which serves 183 students in grades K through 4 in an

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elementary school of 1237 students. The ethnic ratios for the school as a whole are 84% black, 1% white, and 15% second language students, the majority of whom are South East Asian.

We feel this school is special in many ways. We have been extremely impressed by the commitment to their students shown by the principals and teachers , and by the quality of teaching we have seen during our classroom observations. This ESL program has been recognized as one of the top ESL programs in Philadelphia. One example of this recognition is that on a recent certification exam, the top-rated ESL teacher in the district chose to come to this school to work.

At this point we would like to give you an idea of how this particular ESL program is structured. The ESL students are grouped together in self-contained classrooms in grades K through 4. This is unique in the school system; most ESL students are in regular classes with native English speakers, and are "pulled out" for special ESL instruction for between 45 minutes and two and a half hours, depending on their English proficiency. Each class has three English proficiency levels, of advanced, intermediate, and beginning, as determined by the Philadelphia city-wide ESL Screening Test. The program is centered around intensive small group work and individual work. The children are pulled out of their self-contained classrooms by proficiency groups on a regular basis to receive small group instruction in reading and language arts. This means that children are often in groups of either 10 or 20 rather than in the total class size of 30, and that they come in contact with three different classroom teachers during the week as well as with numerous aides and tutors that are also a feature of this program. In addition to the pullout group instruction, the children also receive individual "prescriptions" from their classroom teachers; these prescriptions are performed alone or in pairs in a learning center organized around various tables or "centers", e.g., an alphabet center, a math center, a typing center, etc.

We began observing in this program early in the current school year, and we are continuing our observations at least until the end of this school year and possibly into next year. The four members of our research team observe in the school once a week and two members observe an additional morning a week. We have found that working as a team is valuable in several respects: first, it allows us to cover more territory and add to our pool of observations. Secondly, the four researchers have had different academic backgrounds and

training; this means that each of us brings a different expertise to the project and that as a result, each researcher has a slightly different perspective on the issues that arise. In addition, checking our impressions with one another keeps us from making unsupported generalizations and other untenable inferences. Although there are disadvantages to doing ethnographic work in a group-- the work is more difficult to organize and discussions are time-consuming--we believe that the team approach has provided a useful check on individual accuracy. The question of individual accuracy in ethnography, in fact, is one issue which we would like to see further addressed with more group work.

We would now like to turn to a rather detailed discussion of our classroom observations. On the methodological level, the purpose of this detailed discussion is to show that the original question that we were pursuing--namely, language use and its relationship to the learning process--could not be approached directly. We had to first step back and cope with the variety in what we were seeing--the variety of purposes in classroom events and the variety of understandings of the events, which in turn, were influenced by the tremendous diversity in social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the participants.

At the very beginning of our work, we identified our primary "domain" of interest as second language use in the classroom. Originally, on the basis of studies in classroom discourse and ethnographic research of culturally diverse learners , we identified a number of issues which we hoped would provide a focus to our observations. These included: 1) looking at social networks within a classroom and their relevance to the second language acquisition process; 2) the determination of "participant structures" within a classroom of culturally diverse learners; 3) the tracking of a student's L1 and L2 language contacts. We decided as a way of organizing our observations, to focus on one particular issue each week, for example, L1 and L2 language contacts. But we found that, while focussing on one particular issue at a time helped us to manage the flood of new information and impressions we were inundated with, the issues we started with did not seem particularly helpful in understanding language use and its relationship to the learning process in this setting.

Further, as our observations progressed, we were often surprised by events in the classroom where the teacher and the children seemed to direct their attention to, and find significance

in, differing aspects of the event. (This will be further explained as the paper progresses and we give some examples from our data.)

We hypothesized that in such situations, as Hymes, Heath, Philips, Michaels, and other researchers have pointed out, that each participant's understanding of the event varied, shaped by a variety of social, cultural, and linguistic factors, and further, that the differences in what was focussed on in any given event were related to different understandings of the PURPOSE of the event. This led us to understand that classroom events serve a variety of purposes. Three major purposes that we have identified in our observations of classroom events, we will describe as academic, communicative, and socialization. Our grouping of the events according to these three purposes was supported by teachers' stated goals for student learning in subsequent interviews that we did with the classroom teachers.

We would now like to give some examples from our data of what we mean by academic, communicative, and socialization events, and show how they are affected by the social and cultural factors which we have mentioned.

The academic event refers to a set of goals which are related to very specific classroom tasks, those on which students are usually formally evaluated.

A task which might be said to be clearly academic typically requires that the student "get it right ". A clearly academic task was observed in a first grade classroom when the teacher, during a math lesson, called on children to come to the blackboard and shade one half or one quarter of a rectangle, square, or circle. The children who attempted to shade the figures were clearly guessing, and did not understand the concept. After each child filled in part of the figure, the teacher would then ask the rest of the group, "IS HE RIGHT?" The children would answer, "YES, HE IS". If the child had not been right, the teacher would frown slightly and shake her head, at which point the children would then change their response to "NO, HE'S NOT", and the teacher would call on another student to give the correct answer. Throughout the event, the focus was on getting the right answer itself, rather than on the process of getting TO the correct answer.

The communicative component refers to the ability of the student to make him or herself understood in a particular context. An example of an emphasis on the communicative

component is a sentence produced by a second grader during a small-group language-arts period. The teacher had talked about seasons, and had asked students to write sentences about their favorite seasons. After a few minutes of intense work, one boy came up to the teacher with the following sentence, which he seemed quite proud of: he had written, "I love summer that we could go to swim." The teacher responded by saying, "Yes, that's a good sentence. That's a beautiful sentence." She obviously accepted the successful communication of the message as the most important part of the event, and did not correct the sentence structure.

The socialization component refers to the many types of events which aim to steer the child into acting in appropriate ways both in and out of the classroom. Learning classroom rules of behavior often takes precedence over giving the right answers, as in a class where Mrs. P, the teacher, refused to accept answers to her question when they were called out. She accepted an answer only when one student sat up straight and raised his hand.

These three components--academic, communicative, and socialization--are interrelated, and may operate simultaneously within a particular classroom or on a particular task. Our observations reveal, however, that classroom tasks usually emphasize or "weight" one of the components over others during a particular activity, for example, by assigning more time to it or by the teacher's explicit evaluation of the activity. Which component tends to be weighted more during a task seems to depend on the teacher, the students, the class composition, the classroom learning situation, and the nature of the task itself. Some tasks may appear to focus on one component, e.g., academic, while in reality , they are heavily loaded in favor of another component, such as socialization. Watching a small ESL group of first graders, we noticed that while the set task was to identify the capital and small letters of the alphabet, the majority of time in doing the task was spent on socialization to school rules--the children had to raise their hands, give an answer, then stand up, push the chair in, squeeze by the other students in the row by saying, "Excuse me", go up to the teacher, take the card to their seat, sit down, and fold their hands.

In another classroom, children were asked to make booklets out of construction paper. The function of the booklet was to contain a list of the new vocabulary they were learning. The teacher told them that they could design and decorate this booklet any way they wanted to, and he gave some examples of how they might do it. During the booklet-making activity,

children frequently went to the teacher, asking for more explicit directions on how to make the booklet. The teacher refused to offer further advice, stressing that it was each individual's choice as to what the booklet should look like. Although the activity involved several types of skills, the emphasis from the teacher might be described as heavily weighted towards socialization to the American classroom and society, which tends to value individual responsibility and creativity. Moreover, the children seemed to expect the teacher to lay down specific guidelines for the activity, while the teacher's goals in this activity were for the children to be self-directed and independent. The children clearly felt somewhat uncomfortable with so much "freedom" in the activity; the teacher was very encouraging but firm in his position that they decide how to do the task on their own.

Up to now, we have said that classroom events can be classified as academic, communicative or socialization, and that the primary weighting of the event is influenced by a variety of factors, including teachers' goals. In our interviews with teachers, we found that teachers did have specific goals in relation to these three components, although the goals varied from teacher to teacher in the importance assigned to the different components. For example, teachers mentioned having academic goals for their students such as wanting them to "develop their thinking", "reach their fullest potential in math, reading and language arts". They also mentioned communicative goals such as students having the "ability to answer the teacher's questions" and students being able to get their needs known in problem situations inside and outside of the classroom, like being able to give their name and address in an emergency. Overall, however, we were struck by the extent of the teachers' stated focus on socialization goals. In response to questions such as "What is a successful student?" and "What are your personal goals for your students?", teachers overwhelmingly made comments such as wanting their students to "feel comfortable in the classroom", "be well behaved and well mannered", "have respect for each other", "be comfortable with our culture", "have a good attitude toward learning", and so forth. The ESOL program administrator, who had a major hand in developing the program structure, feels that the program's success lies in its ability, through self-contained classrooms and other structural aspects of the program, to provide children with opportunities for learning which can best be categorized as socialization, namely, which allow children to be acculturated better, feel more comfortable learning, and so forth. In the classroom, we have seen these socialization goals often embedded within academic events, as we have noted above, so that

a task can provide opportunities for learning on a variety of levels, only one of which is academic.

The fact that teachers have a variety of GOALS for student learning and that classroom events may have multiple PURPOSES which are weighted differently in different situations has implications for student learning. First, due to the large variety of ethnic backgrounds among children in this particular school, there may be very few shared norms for classroom interaction and behavior. In addition, the weighting of a particular component in a classroom event--be it academic, communicative, or socialization--provides different OPPORTUNITIES for learning, and will likely affect the rate and type of learning that these children experience. For example, some classes seem to be modeled on very traditional, authoritarian lines. In these classes, children generally do not speak unless called on to do so, or unless there is a specific oral language type of activity, such as a repetition drill. This type of classroom might be said to weight the academic and socialization events quite heavily. In other classes, and especially in the room known as the "learning center", children seem to have more opportunity to initiate talk. They also seem to have more opportunity to speak with the teacher, the teacher aide, and the volunteers. This type of classroom emphasizes primarily communicative activities. These different opportunities for second language interaction in the classroom may affect the rate and nature of children's second language acquisition.

Learning in a second-language classroom seems to involve a considerably more complex set of influences than learning in a native speaker classroom. The academic, communicative, and socialization components of school events are directed, or "weighted" as we said, by explicit or implicit expectations for performance held by students, teachers, administrators, and parents. As we have said, the factors that comprise these expectations include language background, socio-cultural attitudes, socio-economic status, and other elements which we have mapped out on the overhead chart, which is the same as your handout.(ENTER OVERHEAD CHART) As we have noted, the elements involved in the L2 situation are particularly rich and varied. As an example of how the social and cultural factors affect a classroom event, we can look at the following dialogue, which occurred in a first grade class.

The teacher had been talking about the upcoming holiday--Martin Luther King day--and she told the children that King wanted all people to live together in peace--that all people should be like brothers and sisters and they should try to love one another. At this point, a Cambodian boy got upset and yelled out, "I don't love the Vietnamese!" The teacher asked, "Why, Dinh?" He said, "Because the Vietnamese killed my father!" Then Tod, a Vietnamese boy burst out, "My father didn't kill your father!" This dramatic event reminded us that even six year olds, particularly these Asian children who have had a very traumatic recent past, come to school with a great deal of prior life experience, which often affects their experience in the classroom.

Thus, this socialization event of enculturating students to American values, was perceived by the Cambodian student in a manner rather different from the way the teacher had expected it to be, and points up one of the ways in which cultural differences surface in the classroom. As teachers and researchers, we need to think about how student and teacher perceptions of an event or interaction may be different, due to the complexity of cultural factors involved, and we need to think about how this complexity affects the learning situation.

In their interviews, teachers indicated an awareness of the complexity of cultural factors affecting events in the classroom. Although they noted that individual differences among children existed, they also found that children from different cultures, when given a particular learning task, tend to approach it in different ways. For example, the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hmong children have a tendency to listen and observe for a period of time before participating; Cambodians and Puerto Ricans are more apt to get involved immediately. Puerto Ricans and Cambodians have been noted to be more verbal and open, as well as more tactile than other groups. The teachers also mentioned that Asians tend to approach a task with a high degree of self-sufficiency in contrast to other language groups. The Asians frequently ask for more homework and are seen by the teachers as being highly motivated and personally responsible for their academic achievement.

We found these perceived distinctions on the part of the teachers to be extremely interesting; what we found even more interesting was that although the teachers noted several types of distinctions, their distinctions were consistently along the same general lines. On the other hand, when attributing the differences to particular factors, the teachers had not only

diverse but disparate views on the causes of these attitudinal/behavioral differences. They attributed the differences to a variety of factors, such as: the students' proficiency in English, the amount of time in the U.S., whether or not the child had had prior schooling either here or in the native country, different cultural norms – say, attitudes toward school and authority figures, different learning styles", or the way the children view their status in America. One teacher mentioned that some groups have the attitude that this is our home and we can't go back", and that this attitude contributed to the children's performance in class.

We have found that, although teachers were uniform in their perception of the surface characteristics of children, the underlying causes of these characteristics were attributed to a variety of factors. If teachers attribute different motivations to similar types of behavior, these different attributions might also affect the teachers' interpretations of children's behavior in the classroom. Depending on how teachers interpret these differences, their expectations of children may also vary. Different expectations of cultural groups might, then, lead to different learning opportunities in class events. For example, take the question of observation vs. participation. Say a teacher gives a task to students – some students are silent. How will the teacher interpret the silence? As lack of comprehension, as shyness, as defiance or hostility to the task, or as an observation period which is a normal approach to the task for a student from a particular culture? And how will that interpretation affect the degree and type of learning which takes place during that task?

Teachers, then, attribute cultural differences among children to diverse causes. It would not be surprising if differences in attribution affect interpretation or expectations of behavior. It is not always the case in a real life situation that both the teacher and the student view a task or event in the same way, as we have noted with the Martin Luther King example. But before we examine events where the student and teacher seemed to understand the meaning of the event differently, we would like to go back to the example we presented earlier of a communicative event where both the teacher and the student had a SIMILAR understanding of the event. This is the example where the Asian student came up to the teacher with the sentence, "I love summer that we could go to swim." Mrs. F's response to the student was, "That's a good sentence. That's a beautiful sentence." Despite the non-standard grammatical nature of the sentence produced, this sentence clearly fulfilled Mrs. F's

requirement of the task, and she praised the student explicitly. Here the teacher verbally acknowledged the degree to which the student's response to the task met her expectations.

Sometimes, however, it is unclear whether students' expectations and the teacher's expectations match. This may result in a situation where the teacher and student end up with different interpretations of the same interaction exchange. An example of this type of situation is the following:

Ms. Q. asked students for an example of a sentence using the word 'bus'. One student answered, -A bus is what you use when you ain't got no car." Ms. Q. responded by repeating the student's answer, accentuating "ain't" and using question intonation, "A bus is what you use when you AIN'T got no car?" The student nodded, "Yes", pleased with his answer, and with the teacher's repetition of his answer for the benefit of the class. Ms. Q. did not correct the student's mistaken impression of her comment, and proceeded to another task.

In this example, we can see that the student not only failed to understand the problem with his sentence, but interpreted the teacher's repetition of his sentence as recognition of the acceptability of his answer. The teacher, on the other hand, clearly did not like the student's answer, but relayed that information to the student in a way which he did not understand, for a variety of possible reasons, some of which may include his lack of knowledge about how sarcasm is expressed in this culture, and that "ain't" belongs to a variety of English not acceptable in the classroom.

In some cases, a student may discover what is expected of him or her as the interaction proceeds. Returning now in more detail to an example we mentioned earlier, we want to show that children sometimes change their response to more closely match the expectations of the teacher. In this example, Mrs. P. had pointed out the Chinese zodiac which was decorating the wall and mentioned to the class that the Chinese New Year was coming. Then she asked, "Who knows what year is coming?" Several children called out, "Tiger!", including one student, Tod. Mrs. P. responded by looking around the room and ignoring the answers shouted out by the class. Tod, understanding that Mrs. P. would not accept the answer if it were given in an unacceptable manner, quickly sat up straight, folded his hands on the desk in front of him, and looked at her, now the epitome of a "model student".

Mrs. P. looked at him, and then looked meaningfully at the rest of the class, whereupon the rest of the class followed Tod's example. When the class had settled down, Mrs. P. said, "What is the answer, Tod?" to which Tod responded, "Tiger". "Yes", confirmed Mrs. P., "the year of the tiger is next."

This interaction was a clear example of the need to fulfill both academic and socialization requirements of the teacher. However, we have noticed that academic and socialization expectations VARY from teacher to teacher and situation to situation. For example, one student, Dale, has a tendency to make spontaneous comments and even to shout out answers in Mrs. L's class. Mrs. L tolerates this and even plays along with Dale, such as on occasions when he anticipates her instructions. In one instance, on a workbook assignment in which Mrs. L was choosing animals to have the children circle, Dale said, "Circle the word 'goat'", followed by Mrs. L's instructions, "Circle the word, 'goat'". The whole class laughed. However, when Dale went from Mrs. L's class to the learning center that day, the same behavior was not appreciated by the teacher and aides, and he was encouraged to act in a more disciplined manner. The interesting point here is that there is not just ONE type of appropriate behavior that a child must learn in this school. Not only must the student assimilate the general rules for appropriate social behavior in an American classroom, but he or she must learn which particular rules of behavior are considered appropriate in which classroom tasks and settings. Considering the complexity of this particular ESL program, this may not be an easy task.

In summary, we have discussed teachers' perceptions of cultural differences and their causes, and how these differences may affect their interpretations of children's behavior as well as affect their own expectations of children for any particular event. We have seen examples of the various ways in which a student's and teacher's expectations may or may not match with respect to a particular classroom interaction. These expectations involve: understanding the nature of the exercise, giving the correct answer, and behaving in ways acceptable to the teacher in a particular classroom or for a particular task. The reasons why a student and teacher's expectations may not concur might be due to one or more factors. For example, from the teacher's perspective, mismatched expectations may occur if the teacher fails to correctly interpret a student's academic ability, or a student's social knowledge of the L2 culture. From the student's point of view, mismatch of expectations might arise if the

student incorrectly interprets the teacher's responses due to cultural differences regarding appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, or if the student fails to remember which types of behavior are acceptable or desired for which teachers, during which tasks, and in which classrooms.

As you can see, the problem of matched expectations is a complicated one,involving, for each interaction, several types and levels of behavior which differ depending on factors such as the cultural background and attitudes of the teacher and the students, the nature of the task, and the classroom setting. If our goal is to understand the learning process, then it is important for us to be sensitive to those factors which shape the expectations of both the teacher and the student, and which may play a role in transmitting and mediating these expectations in the second-language classroom.

Now we would like to return to one of our original questions--that of language use in the classroom. We found that language use, and attitudes toward language use are also strongly tied to whether the event is academic, communicative, or socialization--or some mixture.

In situations where children are allowed to work together at a table or work with a partner at a learning machine, and when talk is allowed, we have seen no instances where teachers explicitly disapprove of or disallow L1 talk as opposed to English.

For example, in Mrs. F's class, when there is a task which is to be completed individually, the children often talk to the person sitting next to them, comparing pictures that they are drawing, or answers in the book. This may go on in English, or in the children's first language. In this activity, one of the children, Vera, typically gets up from her seat and goes over to her older brother, Vito, who talks openly with her in Spanish about the work. Mrs. F.feels this talk between children is natural and accepts it.

In the learning center, there is a table,the clay table, where children go while they are waiting for a machine to use. The teacher, Mrs.R., says that this table gives the children important non-structured time, to create, be by themselves, speak their L1 if they want, etc.

In both these examples, the teachers' goals for the activities do include the use of L1, and in fact, openly allow it to occur among the children. In the case of Vera and her brother Vito,

above, Mrs. F. feels the use of Spanish is necessary for Vera to understand what is going on.

Teachers also initiated the use of the child's L1, primarily in connection with academic events. For example, in her reading class, Mrs.F. was explaining the homework assignment to the class. At one point, she asked one of the students, Vladimir, if he understood. He didn't answer. She then asked his sister to explain to him in Spanish what the assignment was, which she did at some length. Mrs. F. watched the two children while this was happening, smiling, and then she asked Vladimir, "Now do you understand?" He said yes. In this example, although other purposes may be accomplished by using the L1 (such as building teacher- student rapport), the overt purpose of the teacher's use of the L1 was to help the child understand an academic task.

We have also seen the teachers initiate L1 use, with younger children, around socialization events, as in the following example, which occurred in the kindergarten class. In one exercise, Ms. B. used pictures of different animals to work on counting. At one point in the exercise, she asked a Spanish child, Sylvia, to point out the picture displaying two dogs. Sylvia clearly didn't understand the word "dog". Mrs. B. repeated, and then glossed the word "dog" for the child in Spanish. Sylvia still didn't respond. Mrs. B. then used Spanish once more, this time telling the child that she must answer the teacher when called on: "Tu tienes que DECIRme cuando te digo de hablar" (You have to TELL me something when I tell you to speak). Clearly, in this task, the teacher used the child's native language for two purposes: to make sure that the child understood the academic nature of the task, and to explain to Sylvia what type of classroom behavior was expected of her in this class.

Although children are generally allowed to use their L1 or English while working with each other, we have not seen them allowed to initiate L1 usage in a classroom activity led by the teacher. For example, in her reading class, Ms. L. was trying to elicit the vocabulary item "sand". The children were looking at a picture of a pail in their workbooks, and Mrs. L. asked, "Do you know what's in it?" Dinh said something in Cambodian, and Mrs.L. smiled and said, "In English please!" Dinh laughed. One of the other students shouted out, "Sand!"

Here use of English is the GOAL of the activity, as both the teacher and Dinh know--this is not just for the student to demonstrate that he knows the English word, but as a practical matter of communication: since the teacher doesn't know Cambodian, she doesn't know whether Dinh is saying the right answer until he uses English. Thus the use of English becomes both an academic and a communicative event.

Contrast this with the use of English in a bilingual program where the teacher and the student understand each other in the non-English language, and where a requirement to speak English in the classroom is thus a purely academic--not a communicative--event. We would propose that requiring a child to use English has very different meaning under these two different classroom circumstances.

One of the most interesting areas of attitudes toward language use in the classroom is teachers' NEGATIVE evaluation of students' unsolicited talk. During activities that are run by the teacher, students often talk to each other--often covertly, but not always. This talk may be in Ll or in English, but its primary characteristic is that the teacher doesn't want it happening. This kind of side talk between students is continually being pointed out, negatively evaluated, and punished.

An example of the negative evaluation of talk was observed when an aide in a third grade class was leading a game in front of the room and constantly monitored the children's talk with statements such as , "If you talk, you cannot play!" He asked them questions such as, "When you play the game, do you make noise?" at which point the children all together shouted, "No!" Then he asked, "Do you fight?" The children: "No!"

Even in the kindergarten class, the children are taught not to talk when the teacher doesn't want it: Mrs. B. said to her class as they were going to get their coats to go home and were talking, "Students, I'm not happy with you. You are not supposed to talk when you put your coats on."

One of the teachers actually seats the children to cut down on talking, with the boys next to the girls, since she knows that in the Ll culture, boys and girls are not seated side by side.

The negative evaluation of talk in the classroom raises interesting questions about how children--especially ESL learners--understand the value and purpose of talk in the

classroom, and how they understand the rules for speaking which involve different settings, events, and participants in the classroom. As we noted earlier, the opportunities available for using English in the classroom may affect the type and rate of language learned. These students have no classroom contact with with native speakers other than teachers and little opportunity, in some classes, to interact with one another. However, on the playground and in the lunchroom we found them using their L1. This means that their language learning may be limited to the forms and uses sanctioned by their classroom teacher. We need to know more about what this limited access to English might mean for the development of their literacy. Native English speakers come to school with well-developed oral skills on which their skills of reading and writing can be built, but the children in this program do not bring English oral skills to school.

CONCLUSIONS:

We would like to conclude by reiterating that our research is part of an ongoing, longitudinal study, in which we hope to further address the issues concerning second language learners in American schools. We hope that our observations here have pointed to some of the ways in which cultural differences surface in the classroom. In trying to interpret the differences, we found ourselves face to face with certain characteristics of the learning situation which are particularly relevant to second language learners--and rather surprising.

First, we have seen classrooms where the focus was primarily on academic and socialization tasks rather than on communicative tasks, despite the fact that in our interviews, the teachers stressed the importance of communication skills. In reflecting on this conflict, we realized that socialization plays a very important role in teachers implicit definitions of communicative competence. It seemed, particularly for the youngest children --kindergarten and first grade--that teachers used communicative tasks for purposes of socialization to classroom rules as well as to promote language skills. As the grade levels rise, the emphasis on overt socialization decreases. The emphasis on socialization to the classroom rules may occur because of a lack of shared cultural norms between teachers and

students. It means, in effect, that the issue of what classroom communicative competence is considered to be is a cloudier issue than we had originally thought.

We have also seen that the problem of "how to be a successful student" is, for the student, a much more complex problem than it initially appeared, even with the well-structured program, supportive administration, and wonderful teaching staff in this school. Children face the difficulty of deciphering teachers' goals--which may vary depending on the event, the size of the class, the teachers themselves, and a wide variety of other factors. While this may be difficult even for a native speaker from the same cultural background as the teacher, for these ESL children, with differences in cultural background and language, the challenges are even greater.

Finally, in the process of working together as a research team, we have gained further understanding about using ethnographic methods in the schools. For example, simple as it sounds, it is true that "You don't always get what you look for." In our case, we went looking for answers to questions about language use in the classroom--and found we couldn't begin to understand the meaning of language use in any given event until we understood how language is used in different events, which language is used, the meaning of the event generally, and its place in the entire context of the school, and eventually perhaps, even in the community.

We need to learn more about how the complexity of factors which we have mentioned in classroom academic, communicative and socialization events impacts on the learning of English, the learning of literacy, and the accomplishment of other school tasks. We also need to explore how the home and the community of the children affect their work in school.

The central problem which concerns us, how second language students learn in a new society, is one which we believe will continue to grow in importance during the next few years, especially for those of us who live in large, urban centers, where there has been, and probably will continue to be, an influx of immigrants and refugees. We hope our research will eventually be able to add to our knowledge of how best to help this vital and growing population.